

News Release



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Oceano Dunes SVRA Prepares For July 4 Holiday; Additional Ecologist and New Superintendent Join Staff

Work Begins to Remove Windblown Sand From Pier Avenue Ramp

Several steps have been taken at the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA), including the addition of a resource ecologist and the clearing of windblown sand from the Pier Avenue ramp to ensure emergency access to the beach, as the popular off-highway park prepares for the July 4 holiday.

And, it was announced Friday (June 29) that Superintendent Steve Yamaichi, who serves in a similar capacity at the Hungry Valley SVRA, will serve as acting superintendent at Oceano Dunes until a permanent replacement can be found for Dennis Doberneck who is retiring. Joining Yamaichi is resource ecologist Kim Matthews. Matthew holds a similar position at Hungry Valley SVRA.

"I am looking forward to working with Superintendent Yamaichi throughout these busy summer months and during this transition period. He's the type of person I can call on when something needs to get done quickly and efficiently, whether it is protecting wildlife or any important issue that involves the operation of parks," said David L. Widell, deputy director of the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division of California State Parks.

Widell said Yamaichi and Matthews will assist Chief Ranger Andy Zilke and resource ecologist Laura Gardner "in the excellent work that has been already underway" at Oceano Dunes. Prior to joining State Parks, Matthews, who holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Portland State University, was with the Nature Conservancy in Irvine before joining State Parks.

The summer season at the popular Oceano Dunes SVRA coincides with the nesting seasons of the threatened western snowy plover and the endangered California least tern. These small birds nest on the bare sands within the recreation area. Although their movements are monitored and their nests are protected within fenced areas, they can still be disturbed by inappropriate visitor activities.

Widell said State Parks remains committed to keeping Oceano Dunes open to the public while at the same time increasing the protection of wildlife. He noted that the OHV

Division's efforts to balance these needs are unprecedented in the history of the operation of Oceano Dunes SVRA.

For that reason State Parks has taken several important steps to protect these birds that have been the object of intense study and management efforts at Oceano Dunes SVRA since 1994. That action includes utilizing experts in land use and wildlife, such as the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, to address major issues.

Nest sites are protected by fenced exclosures through seven months of the breeding and nesting season each year. The nests are monitored daily, and movement of western snowy plover chicks is monitored up and down the coast. Individual nests found outside the large exclosures are usually fenced off within a half-hour of being located. Signs are posted to advise visitors to stay out of exclosure areas.

State Parks increased ranger and ecologist staffing levels at the beginning of the summer to both monitor these species and to ensure visitor compliance with the protection measures that are in place. Ranger staffing during peak holidays, such as July 4, is nearly double this summer, and the number of field biologists has been increased as well. As a result there have been extended hours of nest site monitoring.

Work began Friday to remove windblown sand at the Pier Avenue entrance to Oceano Dunes to maintain and ensure safe emergency vehicle access. Pier Avenue is one of two public access points to the park. The other is at Grand Avenue.

According to the permit, sought by State Parks and granted by San Luis Obispo County, State Parks will maintain a maximum ramp width of 28 feet between June 28 and July 9, and August 30 and September 4; and a maximum of 12 feet between July 6 and August 29, and after September 5.

As part of an ongoing education program, each visitor to the SVRA is given a flyer reminding them that their future access to the park is dependent on their responsible behavior and strict adherence to laws and park policies. Rangers rigorously enforce vehicle speed limits on the beach, as well as violations of litter and dog leash laws and see that visitor activities do not disturb these sensitive species.

In addition, permanent interpretative signs have been posted at the Pier and Grand Avenue entrances that describe the least tern and snow plover population status and the threats to their survival.

Oceano Dunes SVRA is one of California's most popular State Parks and represents the last 5 ½ miles of beach along California's 1,100 miles of coastline where motorized recreation is still allowed.

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